

Saga

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN FIONA STAPLES

TM



CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN



FS'13

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Saga

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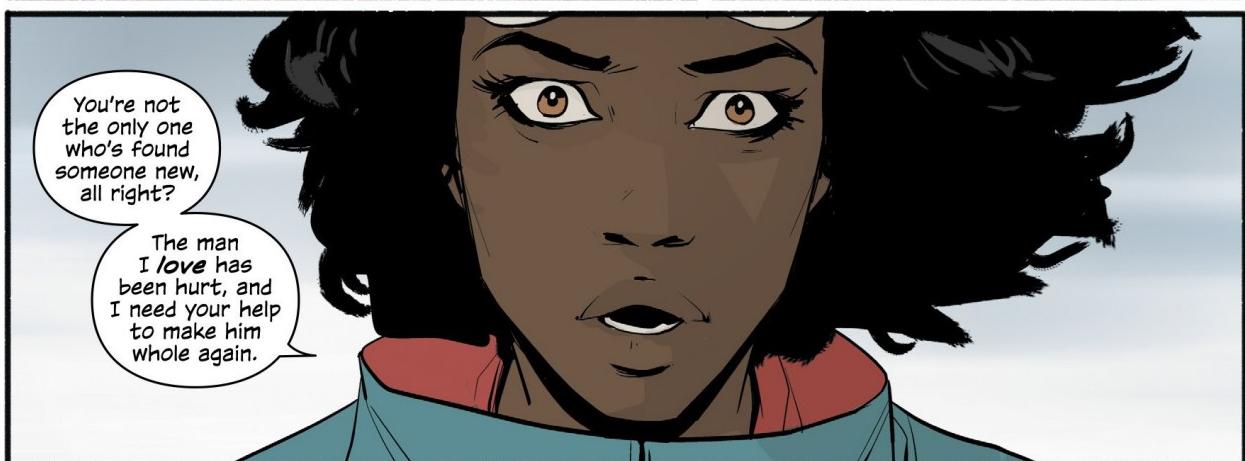


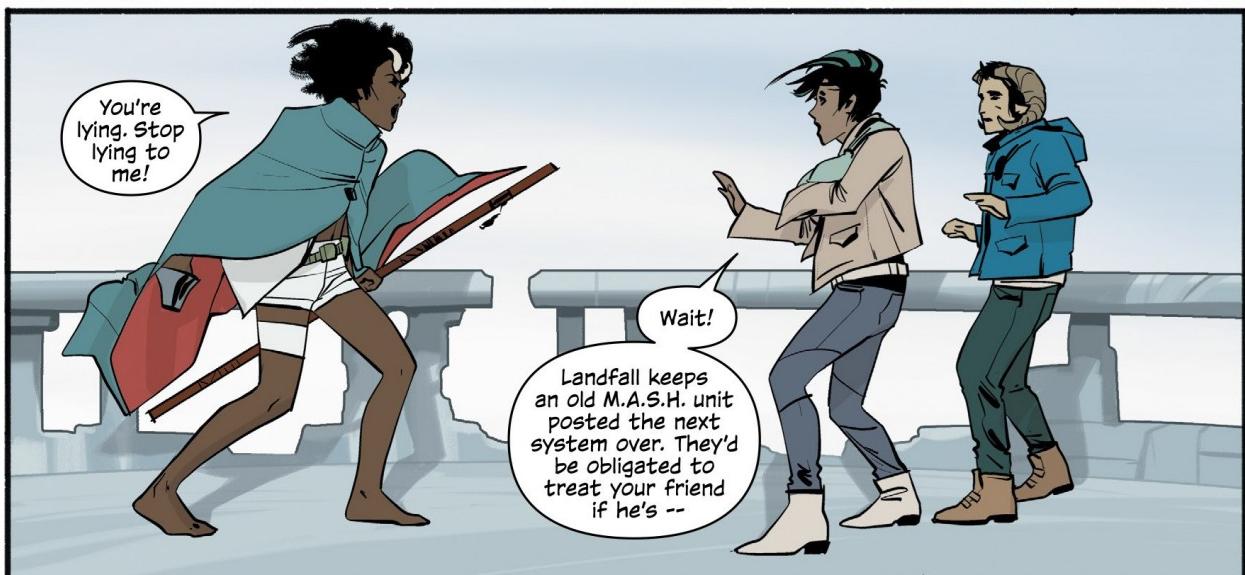


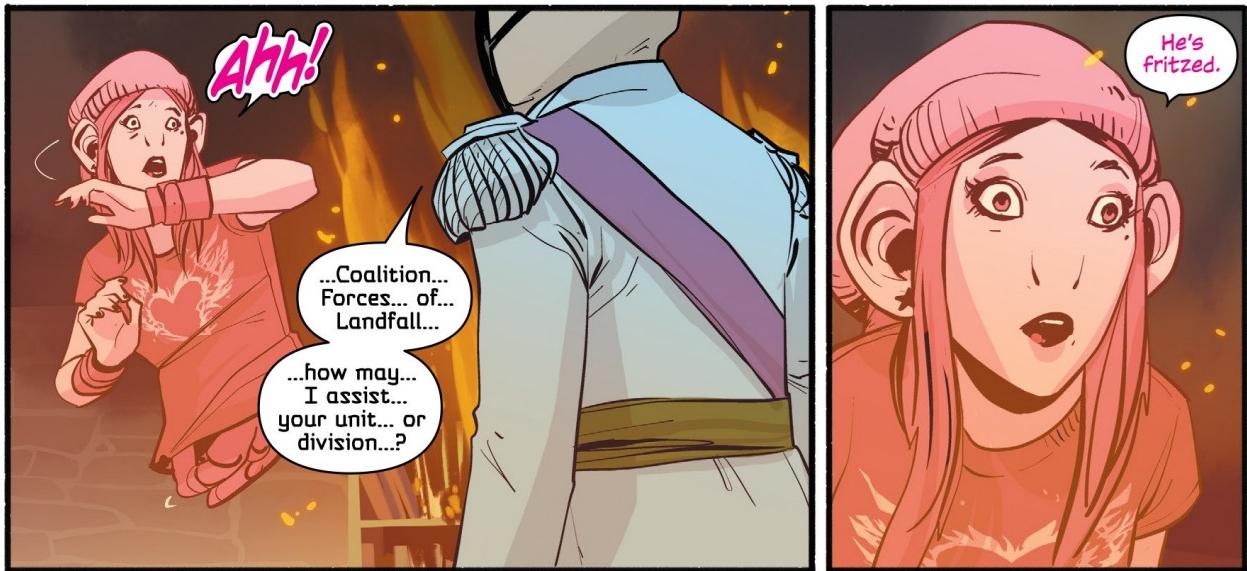


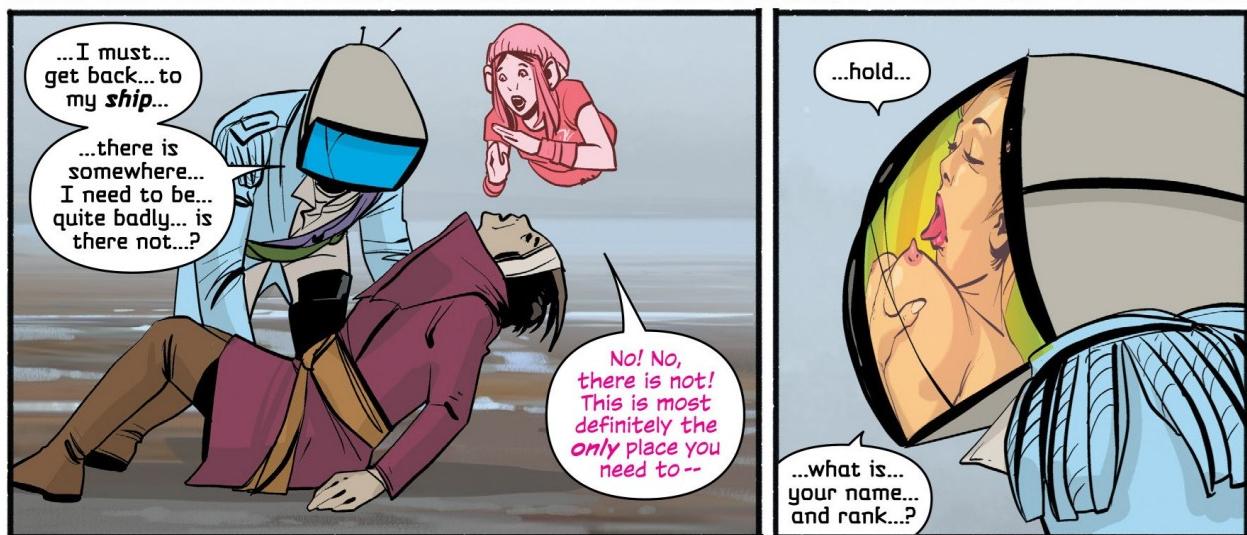
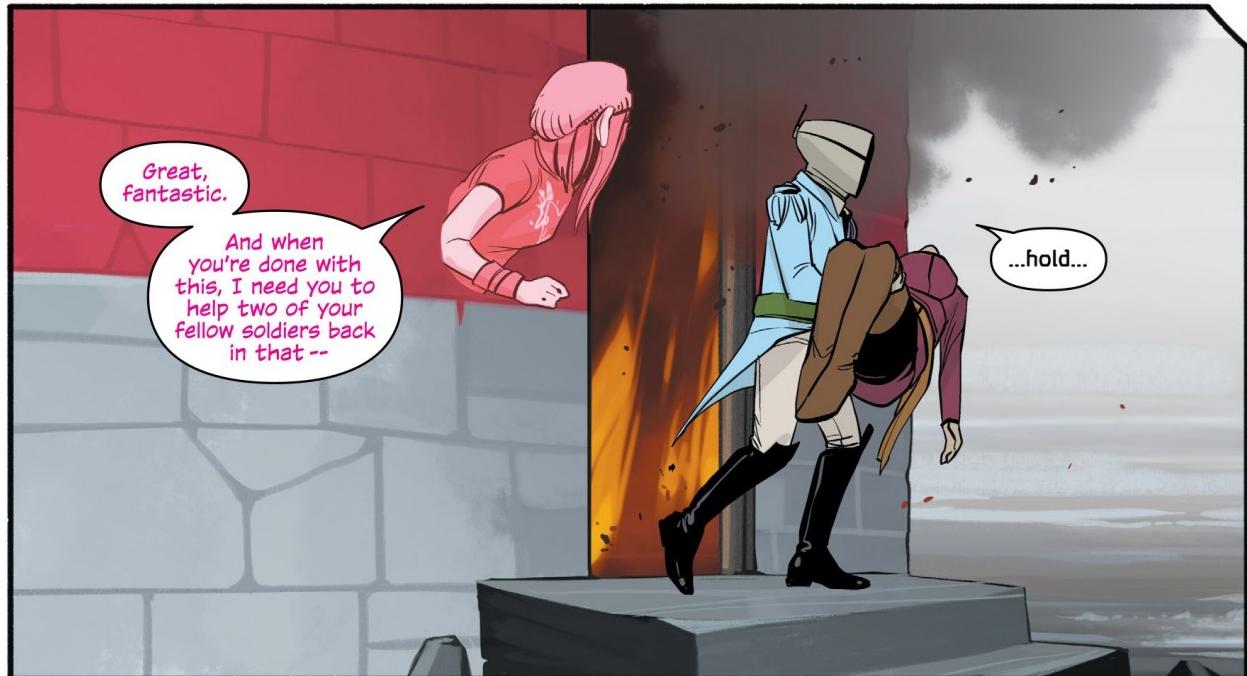






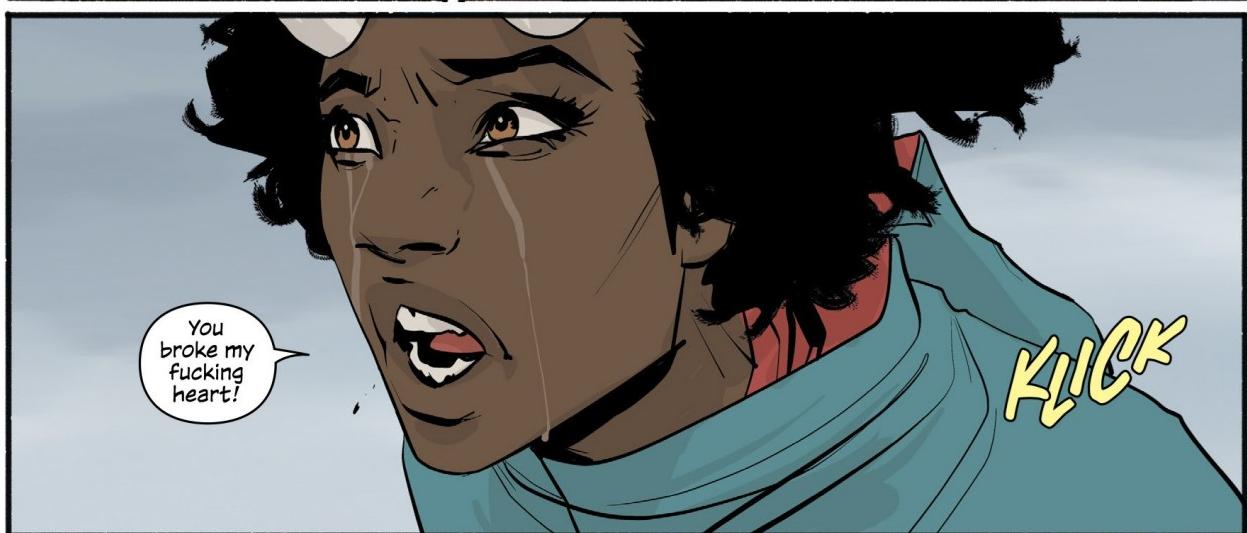










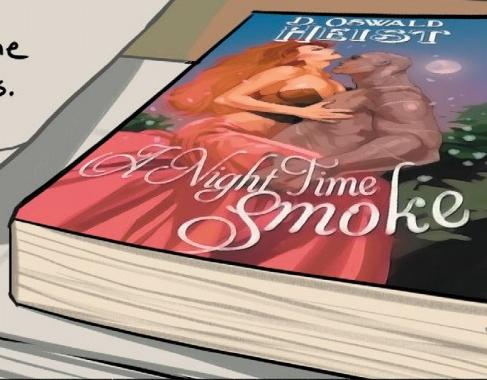


You'll
live.



Mom and Dad
wanted to stick around
for a proper burial, but
my devastated Granny
argued that Heist would have
appreciated where he ended up...

... mixed amongst the
ashes of his creations.



Listen
to this.

While the effects of
Embagon are usually
permanent, they
can be reversed... if
the casters of the
spell are hanged
until dead.

So now
you want us
to assassinate
professional
assassins?

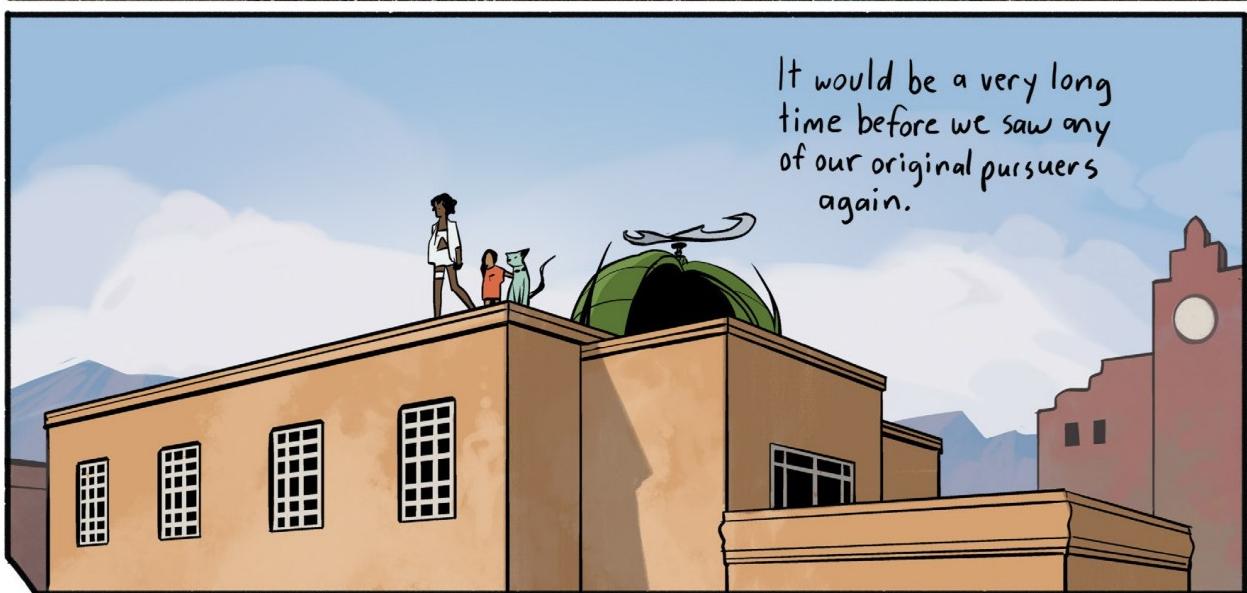
Upsher, you've
been looking for loop-
holes to this stupid
curse for months.
Face it, we lost this
one, but there'll
always be --

Hey, you
two assholes
want to cover
a story about
a robot?



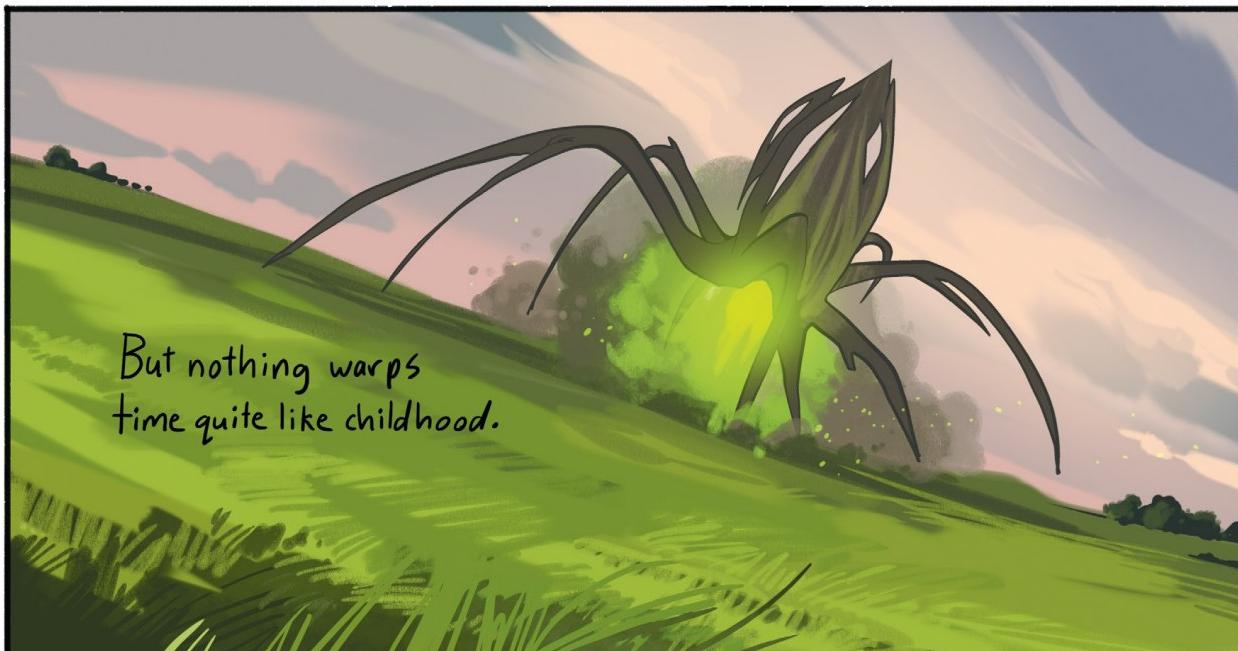




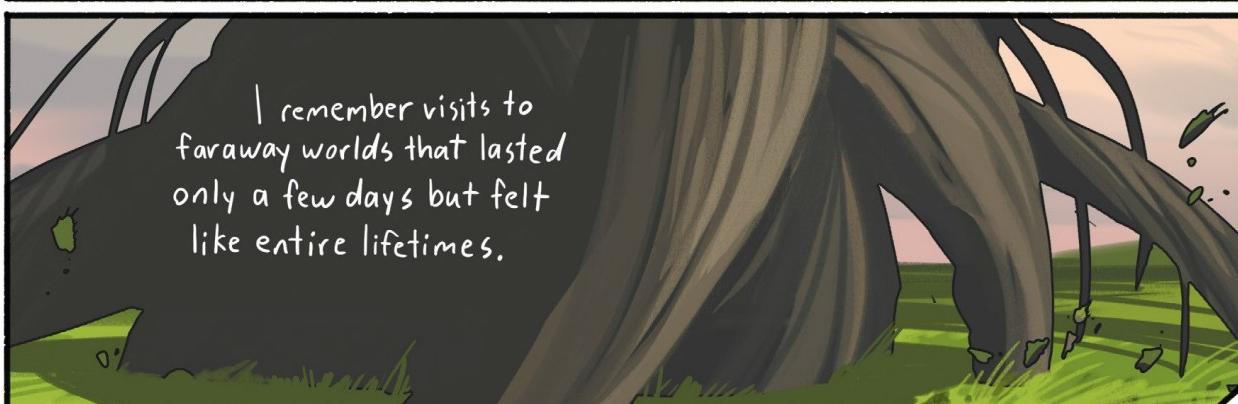




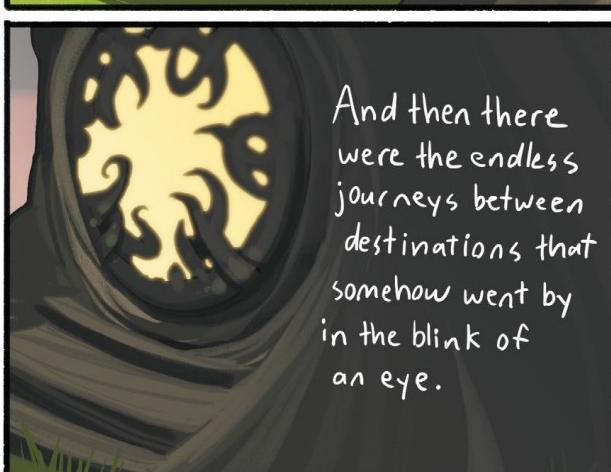
At least, it seemed kinda long.



But nothing warps time quite like childhood.



I remember visits to faraway worlds that lasted only a few days but felt like entire lifetimes.

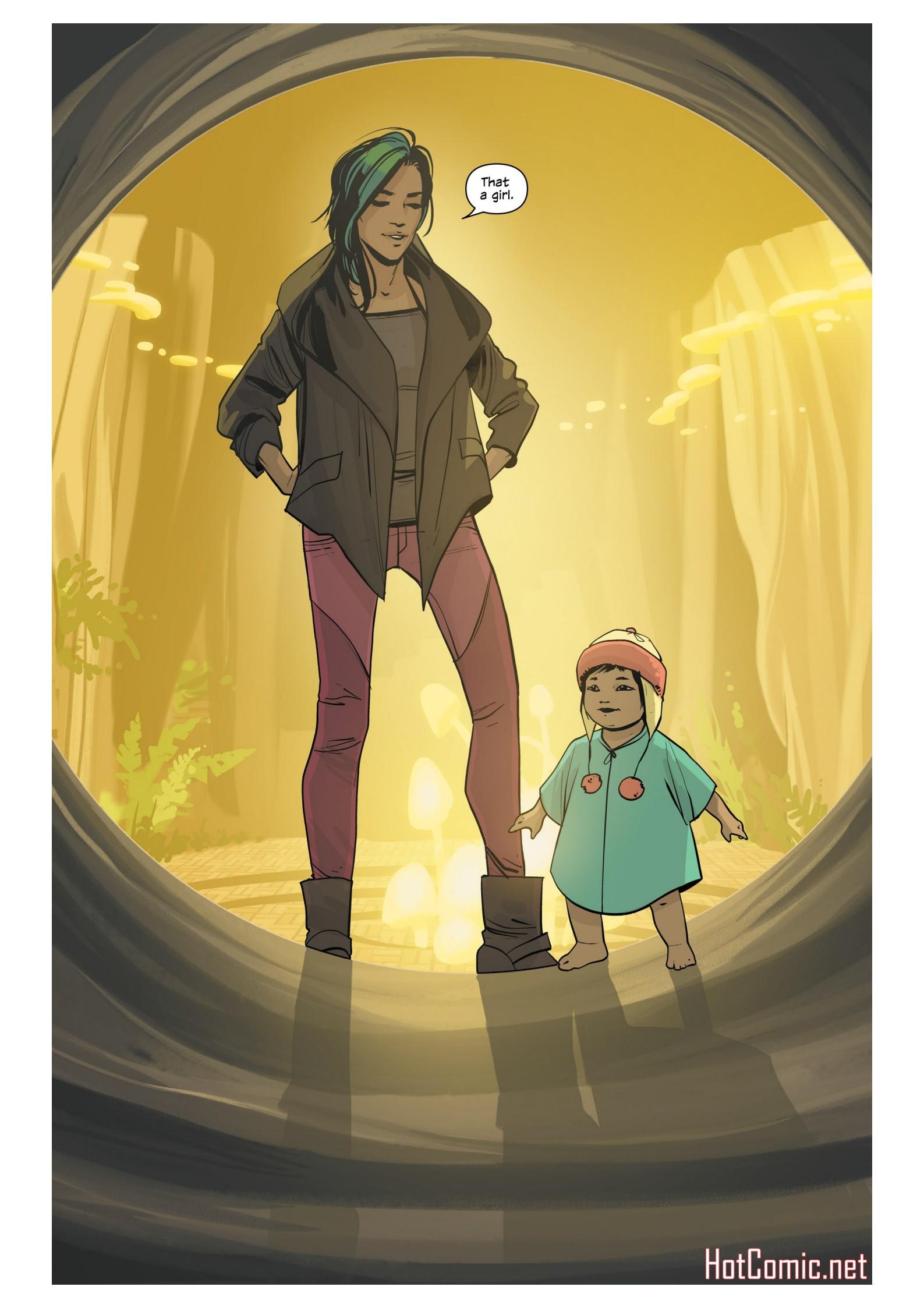


And then there were the endless journeys between destinations that somehow went by in the blink of an eye.



You know how it goes.

Watch your step, silly.



A woman with long dark hair streaked with green stands in a tunnel of bright yellow light. She wears a brown coat over a grey top and maroon pants, with her hands on her hips. A speech bubble above her head contains the text "That a girl." To her right, a small child in a teal tunic and red cap stands barefoot on a path. The background is a glowing yellow tunnel with organic shapes and light rays.

That
a girl.

TO BE CONTINUED

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TIME JUMP!

And there's no going back. In just a few short months, the all-new adventures of Toddler Hazel begin, as our ongoing epic heads in a very different direction.

Wait, did that asshole just say "a few months?" Hey, Brian here with exciting news about our upcoming Vacationanza (hiatus sounds so formal). As we do every six issues, we'll now be taking a brief leave of absence to a) get ahead on the next arc, and b) give our tirelessly devoted retailers a chance to stock their shelves with March's *SAGA VOLUME THREE* (already collecting this very storyline!), so that new readers can hopefully join our series when we return monthly in May.

We'll miss you all dearly while we're apart, but for what it's worth, the entire team is already hard at work on our next issue, and this schedule allows us to keep giving you our best stuff without ever having to resort to fill-in artists, ghostwriters or undocumented letterers. Thanks again for your patience and understanding.

And the *To Be Continued* offices stay open all year long, so please keep sending your letters, demo tapes and cool garage sale discoveries to the address above (though I should probably pull back the curtain long enough to note that "Suite 332" is really just a P.O. Box, as some hardcore readers have apparently shown up at Dickens Box Postal Shipping Center & Notary hoping to meet loyal dachshund Hamburger K. Vaughan, who actually resides at an undisclosed location elsewhere in the Uncanny Valley).

Speaking of Burger, he's currently digging his tiny badger-fighting paws deep into the mailbag to retrieve some of his favorite as-yet-unpublished letters from over the last several months, so let's see what he's unearthed...

Dear Saga Team,

SAGA NEARLY GOT ME FIRED!!!

So I started a new job this week with a computer company and whilst we wait for calls, we are allowed to browse the web and check emails, etc.

Yesterday I visited my Comixology account and opened up the latest issue of *Saga* (no. 11). Now we had been warned about offensive material/behavior and being careful what others may see or think, but it didn't occur to me that one of my comics could fall into one of those categories.

As soon as I opened the comic, my female manager walked past and stopped. I freaked out and quickly went to another issue, only this time, it was the first issue, first panel where the mother says she needs to shit.

After that, I closed it all down but it was too late.

She then told me to follow her into her office where the next 15 minutes were her giving me an angry warning and saying it better not happen again or I'll get fired for showing abusive, inappropriate and offensive material.

After, I realized how stupid I was, and the guys in the office all laughed hysterically at me. I thought you would also find this funny.

Keep up the great work.

Beau Roth
From Australia

Very sorry to hear we may have contributed to your office berating, Beau, but yeah, this book is pretty much the definition of Not Safe for Work. Still, grounds for possible termination? I guess we'd have to ask our friends over at the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund.

Speaking of which, I always sign and personalize a bunch of graphic novels for the CBLDF each year, and you can usually snag one for a small donation at: <http://cbldf.myshopify.com>.

Because I very rarely make it to conventions and I unfortunately can't sign/return anything you send, this is your best opportunity to see what my terrible handwriting looks like defacing Fiona's artwork, so please consider supporting an organization that is, sadly, still very necessary.

Dear SAGA Team,

WATCH OUT!! You all know that KLARA is taking over this book, right? Out of all the great characters you have introduced over the first thirteen issues, I'm digging her the most. A matriarch not to be fucked with. This is one woman you definitely DO NOT EVER want to piss off. Plus, she's got her ear chewed off now, how cool is that?

You really do have something special here, so please don't fuck it up.

Peace + keep up the great work,

Sincerely.
L.J. Kott Jr.
Sanford, FL

P.S. We love you Fiona Staples! I don't think there are enough adjectives in this language to describe how great the art is in *SAGA*.

Thanks, L.J. And I agree, much like Klara, Fiona Staples is not to be fucked with. When's the last time you read eighteen issues in a row of a 22-page comic all drawn AND colored by the same artist? And how the hell does she continue to get more awesome each and every month? It's such a privilege to get to collaborate with her. Like many talented Canadians, Fiona is almost completely unable to accept hard-earned praise, so please make her uncomfortable by tweeting your compliments to @FionaStaples.

All of Fiona's covers for this arc have been instantly poster-worthy, and thankfully, at least a few of them are now available as prints over at EssentialSequential.com, so grab one before they're gone.

And as long as you're in a *Saga*-related shopping mood, may I strongly recommend that you pick up *NOWHERE MEN: VOLUME ONE*, collecting the series that the A.V. Club wisely named one of the best comics of the year. Along with spectacular art from Nate Bellegarde, it's written by our publisher and well-coordinated "coordinator" Eric Stephenson, and ingeniously designed and lettered by our own Fonografiks. It's the ideal read for your Vacationanza.

Dear Brian et al,

Why is the NSA spying on me? I mean, I know they're spying on everyone, but what did I ever do? I'm a normal guy. I don't look at pornography. I mean, sometimes I do. But who doesn't, right? Do you look at pornography, Brian? I'm sure Fiona doesn't look at pornography. What kind of pornography do you like?

Anyways, here's the real problem. I want to write this story where the bad guy triggers a bomb using superconductivity. But I'm afraid to research it because then the NSA will think I'm trying to build a bomb. Even though I'm not, I'm just researching it for a story. Great. Now I sound suspicious. I'll be flagged for sure. Thanks a lot.

Jason N.

Dallas, TX

I shop at Awesome Comics

Hold on, you're certain I look at pornography, but Staples gets a pass? She's the one who's always sneaking pictures of anal beads into our wholesome family drama!

But I share your concerns about privacy in the modern age, Jason, a theme I'm exploring with superstar artist Marcos Martin in (and Sweet Toddler Jesus, I promise to stop plugging after this) our ongoing digital-only sci-fi mystery *THE PRIVATE EYE*, whose first five issues are all available for immediate download at any price you think is fair (including \$0) over at PanelSyndicate.com. Despite both being Luddite technophobes, Marcos and I have no plans to ever do a print version of this particular story, so if you want to read it, please *Lawnmower Man* your way into cyberspace at once. If nothing else, it'll make the wait for Chapter Nineteen at least a little more tolerable.

Dear Brian & Fiona,

Thank you for the countless hours of enjoyment, heartbreak, and mental anguish. Keep up the great work.

This letter is in reference to your recent survey. I have indeed filled out this survey and have sent it off, but not to you. At this point you may be asking, "Why the hell not, Josh?" If I'm Josh, I know you don't know me, but trust me when I say if you did this is how you would address me. Have fun diagramming that sentence!] Well, you see, I have an unhealthy crush on a lady named Jill (not to be confused with Lil whom everyone knows as Nancy). Currently, we are geographically separated, me in Connecticut and her in Rhode Island. We have actually met in person. Rambling aside, I have been writing her letters (real ones like this) in the hopes of winning her affection.

In any case, how this relates to you is that I sent her your survey (torn out like a badass to prove she means more to me than a comic. A gesture she might not understand the significance of just yet). I added a few extra questions for her as well. The last of these officially asks her out on a date.

So if my gambit works, I will send you a picture of us together. I figured if you liked my survey answers Hamburger might give me some cool swag, but if Jill likes my survey then I might get love. So thank you for helping me find the impetus to ask out the girl of my fancy.

With love and Squalor,

Josh U.

Windsor Locks, CT

To be honest, this letter column has, at best, a pretty spotty record of helping readers with their love lives... but I guess it's worth a shot? Good luck, Josh, and keep us in the loop.

Hello Brian, Fiona and everyone who helps create *Saga*,

This is my first letter, and I thought it appropriate to send you our official "holiday card" since you play such a great part in my life, what with *Saga* and all. We saw you guys in Oakland when you announced *Saga* a few years ago, and I was so excited! Now, 16 comics later, I'm still so excited. We both adore the story, characters, art, all of it.

Hope you enjoy the chocolate!

Sophie & Jon

San Francisco, CA

See, Josh, instead of sending the person you fancy creepy surveys ripped out of the back of perverted space comics, maybe try mailing some delicious, organic, fair-traded salted toffee? It certainly made my love deepen for Sophie & Jon here, in ways none of us likely ever could have imagined.

Dear Image Comics, Inc.

Let me just begin by saying that I fucking love you guys and I'm a big fan of most of your work.

I've been purchasing your comics for years now however the reason I'm writing is that since I've been incarcerated I have extremely limited resources and I would like to have some access to subscriptions. If you can assist in any way it would be appreciated very much.

Thank you for your time.

Peace,

Dave

Inmate Mail

PA Dept. of Corrections

You got it, Dave. We're sending some books your way. Hang in there.

To Be Continued,

I'll try to make this quick since I know you're busy. I love your comic, blah blah blah.

My girlfriend reads *Saga* with me but she doesn't read the letters pages despite me telling her they are possibly the best part of each issue. I've tried and tried but her most recent response is "maybe if the world is ending and I have nothing else to do" in a very sarcastic tone. So... there ya go.

Anyway, here's a CD by one of my bands. It's a concept album about an albino bear that is Dracula and is also addicted to cocaine. In the track "Cocaine Dracula," Sherman Oaks, California is referenced in the lyrics. I thought about that when I saw the address at the top of the letters column.

One last thing, I really appreciate your relationship with

Hamburger, especially after reading about his spine surgery. I have three dogs (hogs, I call 'em) and my oldest one (12) has lost an eye and also has mitral valve disease. I also adopted a street dog from Egypt that I encountered during my travels. So I know a bit about the expenses that come from loving hogs and I really identify with you in that regard.

You know, I didn't make this quick at all so I hope you weren't busy.

Josh Nines

Bowling Green, KY

P.S. This letter is okay to print because the girlfriend won't see it anyway. Unless "the end of the world" happens, in which case I have nothing to lose so print it.

Thanks for the kind words, and also for the... intriguing compact disc, sir.

And I don't blame your girlfriend for skipping this part of the book, but you might want to mention that we'll be announcing the rules and prizes for our **Second Official Costume Contest** in the next installment of To Be Continued. You know somebody out there is already trying to paint their poor Saint Bernard to look like Sweet Boy, and these pages are the only place you'll ever be able to see the results. It ain't "the end of the world," but that should be enough to get any right thinking human to at least sample the magic and majesty of our back matter, no?

Brian & Fiona,

Last night was the memorial service for my close friend "Porkchop," who died suddenly and unexpectedly from an intestinal infection two weeks ago. At the memorial, in a semi-circle, were three collages, each containing pictures from different parts of her life: her childhood (most of which she spent in the hospital), her crazy college years when she rocked dreads, and her Boston years—the final few in her total of 29. She was special to me, but I didn't realize what a big part of her life I was until I looked at that last board, and realize I'd either taken or was in almost half of them. One of the pictures on the third collage is a copy of the one I included with this letter. It's a snapshot of us in the backseat of our friend's car last summer, as we headed up to Maine. We're nerding out over *Saga* #4, which had come out recently. She introduced me to your series when #2 was released, and since then, we gushed about the art and storyline to our friends ad nauseam whenever a new issue appeared at Newbury Comics. In fact, we talked about *Saga* the last time I was with her, the weekend before she died.

After she passed away, probably about three days later, I was eating dinner with her roommate Jen, and we talked about Pork. Jen told me that she had spent some time thinking about which friends should get what stuff, and that she thought that Pork would have wanted me to have her copies of *Saga*. Last night, after having a great time drinking and telling stories in her old room with her old college buddies, I took her collection of *Saga* and left. On the train home I clutched the bundle of comics to my chest and cried harder and deeper than I'd been able to since I got the news that she was gone.

I wanted you two and everyone else who has helped you along your way to know that your comics touched the lives of two girls way over on the east coast. Looking through the glossy pages with beautifully deep and interesting characters that I've come to care about, I'm brought back to the first time

I picked up an issue. At that moment, I'm still sitting on her comfy brown couch, reading comics while she watches jazz videos on her iPhone, indoors together on a lovely day in the spring. I can't thank you enough for your love and dedication to your art.

Love,

Hana & Porkchop

Roslindale, MA

Wow. I don't know what to say, Hana. I'm so sorry for your loss, and thank you for such a beautiful letter. You sound like a hell of a friend.

Dear lovely *Saga* peoples,

Firstly, please excuse the typed letter. It seems oddly impersonal, but my handwriting is truly appalling. On with the missive...

Saga came into my life at a rather difficult time for my wife and myself. In October 2011 our baby boy Luke was stillborn, which pretty much shattered our world. Feb 2012, and still reeling from the loss of what felt like our future and any chance of happiness, I lost my job. Oh, and Bump, our beloved house rabbit, died from old age the following week. We were pretty much at our lowest ebb. Ever.

Everywhere we looked were adverts for baby products, babies in TV shows, pregnant women ahoy, and everyone else seemed to be doing much better than we were in general. Life sucked. Things were bleak. What had we done to deserve this? Why couldn't the world just turn off the baby obsession? I ended up glued to the TIVO remote, protecting us from the slightest chance of a reminder of what we'd lost with lightning fast reactions and a distracting comment to Jodi.

Wandering through town on my own while scouring for work a few weeks after being made redundant, I popped into my local comic book shop to pick up what I presumed would be my last comics for a while. As ever, the wonderful guys at Destination Venus cheered me up with nonsense chat and fanboy bickering, and as ever they suggested new things I might be interested in. *Saga* was naturally mentioned (I say naturally, because, let's face it, any comic shop NOT recommending such goodness really wouldn't be worth visiting). Always happy to pick up an issue 1 of anything remotely interesting, I bit, but it wasn't until getting home that I saw the cover.

Oh shit. How it stung. A baby. There's a baby on the cover. Everything I'd been holding back about Luke over the past few months as I tried to stay strong for Jodi just came out. I cried more than I had since the funeral months previously, which seems silly now (crying over a comic cover? Fiona's art is fantastic but come on!), but I clearly needed the release.

I felt better after that. Hugely. The fact there was a baby on the cover and presumably in the comic didn't trouble me as it would have done just hours before. Just letting go of all that pent up anger, loss, sadness, and fury had helped me immensely.

I read the first issue there and then, ignoring my usual favourites, and reread it straight away, which is something I rarely do. I've never read a comic in such a whirl of conflicting emotions. Watching Alana give birth while Marko looked on proudly brought unpleasant memories of our own terrible

experience back, and I felt a genuine pang of jealousy when Marko holds Hazel up saying, "It's a girl". My own "It's a boy" moment had been the most painful, soul tearing instance of my life, and having studiously avoided anything that reminded me of it, finding myself taking part in someone else's special moment was heartrending.

And yet, I couldn't put it down. Tears welled, but soon I was willing these three to safety and a chance at happiness. Marko, Alana and Hazel were living the life I had hoped for us (well, with more lasers, war, and sexy-time TV face robots) – the life of a family. *Saga* made me want this for myself again.

I normally show new comics to Jodi, but in this case I really wasn't sure how she'd react, so I kept it to myself. Stupid really, as it might have helped her in the same way it did me, but my desire to protect her from any further hurt outweighed that.

Nevertheless, I was, if not mended, definitely patched up and ready for round two. Life wasn't winning this one. I'm only getting one chance at this, and losing Luke taught me how precarious this whole shebang is. Money got tight, but I was happier than I'd ever been. Out from the 9-5 grind of my previous job, I realized how much I'd disliked what I did for a living. Working part time and drawing ridiculous zombie portraits for spare change in my spare time made me happy, and ME being happy made Jodi happy. Seeing Jodi smile again made me even happier. Things were definitely looking up.

Oh yeah, and while money was tight, I had to cut down my comics pull list from "EVERYTHING" to just four solitary titles for a while. Waid's wonderful *Daredevil*, Slott's *Amazing Spidey*, the collected volumes of *Starkings* sublime *Elephantmen* and, of course, *Saga*. That's how much your silly alien love book suddenly meant to me.

Fast forward 12 months, and Jodi and I are proud parents to our beautiful baby boy Nathan Scott MacDougall, and we're happier than ever. Despite sleepless nights, terrifying nappies, deafening screams, and trying to figure out why things so small cost so much, we've got a nice life coming together, and I like to think we owe a little part of it to you guys. OK, we did most of the donkey work, but still...

Jodi is waiting for issue 12 before she sits down to read them all in one go (she's a terribly patient woman), but I'm pretty certain she's going to be as big a fan as I am. Nathan too. Although maybe we'll wait until he's a bit older. Not sure I fancy explaining why those people have TVs for heads, or what it is that they're doing.

Nathan even lost his umbilical stump the week that Hazel did, and I reacted much the same as Alana. I expect I was probably more panicky about it in all honesty. I certainly made more retching noises.

Anyway, big thanks to you both for one of the best reads in years, and for helping kickstart my broken heart. Much appreciated.

Ian MacDougall
Harrogate, UK

Man, that letter started out hugely depressing, but it really turned a corner by the end. Congratulations on your bouncing baby boy, Ian and Jodi! I'm so happy for you guys.

But come on, Hamburger, this issue has already been enough of an emotional Tough Mudder. Can't you find one unequivocally joyous bit of news...?

Folks,

Thank you for making *Saga*. My friend Wednesday just had her first child and the story of Marko and Alana rings so true for her. She absolutely loves the series. If you could give her a shout out or just some nice words in one of the TBC sections in the later issues, I'd be very appreciative. She's a great friend.

Thanks,
Michael from Texas

Michael, you're telling me there's a reader out there who shares her name with New Comic Book Day? That's fucking awesome. I hope Wednesday named her kid something equally cool, like *Splashpage Jones*.

Okay, nice pull, Burger, but let's close out this arc strong. After eighteen issues, it's time to find the Ultimate Letter, the Missive Supreme...

Dear Brian K. Vaughan,

This is my first ever letter to a letter column. I normally don't feel the need to... until this. See, I had the weirdest dream. I was in my local comic shop, *Comic Relief* (the best comic shop in all of New Jersey), and for some reason Dan Slott was there. He wasn't doing a promo or anything, just there. For no reason I ask him if he knows or ever met you. He said no. So I told him to read *Saga*, it's pretty freaking fantastic. Then I woke up.

So, yeah, weird dream, huh?
Sincerely,
Steven M.
Ewing, NJ

I hate you so much, Hamburger.

Steven, for some reason, my dog has selected YOU as winner of this month's trip into the Almighty Prize Drawer, from which I've scrounged a signed copy of this very issue, a promotional beer koozie for *Jackass Presents: Bad Grandpa* (no joke, one of last year's finest films), and a ballpoint pen from Paris with images of bikini-clad dancers who undress when turned upside-down. Congratulations?

And from the whole team, sincere thanks again to all of you for continuing to support our weird-ass comic book. I'm ridiculously excited about this next phase of our heroes' lives, so I promise we'll work hard to make it worth the wait.

Your pal,
BKV



IT'S FUNNY, HEARTBREAKING AND REAL ALL AT ONCE,
WHILE ALSO BEING ABOUT SEX AND CRIME...
ONE OF THE BEST COMICS I'VE READ IN YEARS."
- ED BRUBAKER (FATALE, VELVET, CAPTAIN AMERICA: WINTER SOLDIER)

"SEX CRIMINALS IS NOT JUST ONE OF THE BEST
COMICS I'VE EVER READ, IT'S ONE OF THE
BEST THINGS I'VE EVER READ, PERIOD."

-WIL WHEATON, WILWHEATON.NET

"WE DIDN'T THINK MATT FRACTION
AND CHIP ZDARSKY'S SEX CRIMINALS
COULD POSSIBLY GET ANY BETTER THAN
ITS STELLAR FIRST ISSUE.
WE WERE WRONG."

-MELISSA GREY, IGN

"MATT FRACTION IS
ONE OF THE GREAT WRITERS
OF THE MEDIUM AND, HELL,
THIS MIGHT BE HIS
MASTERPIECE."

-BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS
(ALL-NEW X-MEN, POWERS)

"ZDARSKY'S ART
TAKES WHAT COULD BE
THE SKEEVIEST TITLES
ON SHELVES INTO
THE SWEETEST."

- JAMES JOHNSTON,
MULTIVERSITY COMICS

"THIS SERIES IS CLAWING
EVER CLOSER TO
GENUINELY PERFECT."

-DAVID HENDERSON,
MULTIVERSITY COMICS

"YOU'LL DEFINITELY
WANT TO COME
ON BOARD TO SEE WHERE
THIS IS GOING TO GO."

- TONY GUERRERO, COMIC VINE

"WELL... SEX CRIMINALS IS LIKE
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